POLITICS

Peters to launch central NZ–France energy project in Vanuatu during Pacific tour

The initiative aims to reduce Vanuatu's fuel import bills. It comes as Winston Peters leads his final Pacific mission as Deputy Prime Minister to Tonga, Hawaii, and Vanuatu.

From left, Vanuatu President Nikenike Vurobarav, NZ Deputy PM Vaovasamanaia Winston Peters, and Pacific Minister Dr Shame Reti in Vanuatu during Peters' Melanesia trip last year. Photo/PMN News/Ala Vailala

'Alakihihifo Vailala

PUBLISHED
08 April 2025, 3:01pm

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Deputy Prime Minister Vaovasamanaia Winston Peters will unveil a significant renewable energy project in Vanuatu, co-funded by New Zealand and France.

The project, which aims to help reduce the country's fuel import bills, will be launched during a tour of the Pacific by a high-level delegation .

Speaking to *PMN News,* Peters says, "Vanuatu is also very important. We're going to launch a combined project between France and ourselves to help the people of Vanuatu. It's really big."

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The trip, from 10-17 April, also includes visits to Tonga and Hawaii, an island state of the United States, which Peters says is a very important connection.

Peters was scheduled to visit New Caledonia, but that leg has been dropped due to time constraints and the political unrest in the French Pacific territory.

"The Tonga connection is very, very important. The Prime Minister has recently changed, and so has the Foreign Minister.

"We've also got Honolulu, Hawaii. That's a very, very important connection. That's the most eastern direction of our DNA, so to speak."

In a statement, Peters reaffirms New Zealand's commitment to the Pacific.

"The Pacific is grappling with a complex, challenging geostrategic and economic environment, and New Zealand is committed to doing its part to help.

"It is incumbent on us to regularly spend quality time in the Pacific to renew relationships and ensure that we are working with our partners towards mutually-beneficial cooperation. The upcoming Pacific tour is part of this ongoing process."

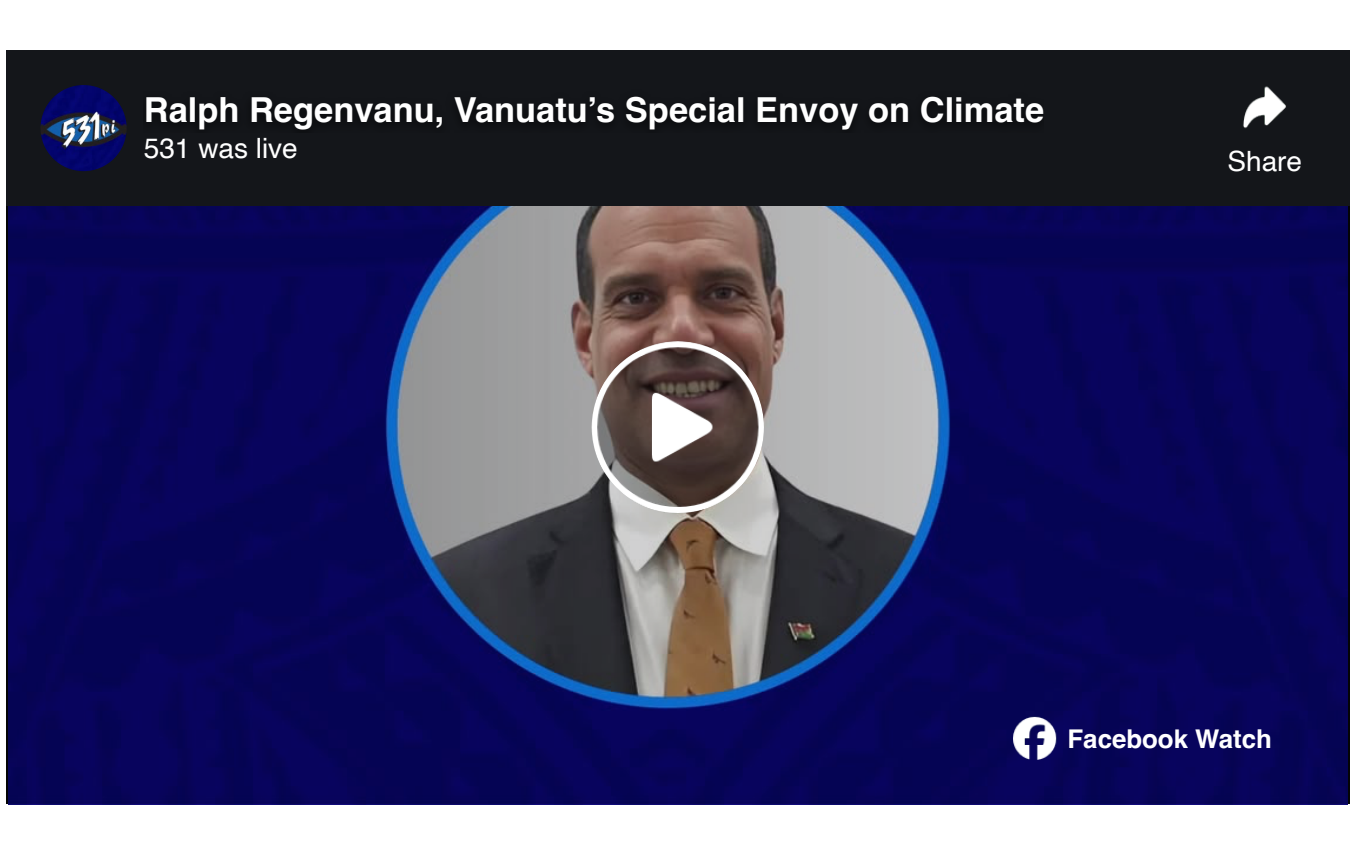
Winston Peters with former Vanuatu Prime Minister, Charlot Salwai. Photo/Supplied

Peters' delegation includes:

- Dr Shane Reti, Minister for Pacific Peoples and Minister for Universities
- Simon Watts, Minister for Climate Change and Energy
- Nicole McKee, Minister for Courts
- Carmel Sepuloni, Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Vice Chair of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Executive Committee
- Tim van de Molen, Chair of the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
- Teanau Tuiono, Assistant Speaker, Green Foreign Affairs Spokesperson, and Co-Chair of the NZ-Pacific Interparliamentary Friendship Group
- Jenny Salesa, Co-Chair of the NZ-Pacific Interparliamentary Friendship Group
- Andy Foster, Chair of the Transport and Infrastructure Committee

The spouses of MPs will also travel with the delegation, which departs New Zealand on Thursday. The group returns to New Zealand on 17 April.

Listen to Vanuatu's Special Envoy on Climate, Ralph Regenvanu's interview below.



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POLITICS

David Seymour stands firm on Treaty bill despite opposition

As the Treaty Principles Bill's second reading looms, the ACT Party leader says he will not consider submissions as a measure of public opinion.

David Seymour is the Minister for Regulation and the Associate Minister of Health, Finance, and Education. He was first elected to Parliament as MP for Epsom in 2014, and became Leader of the ACT Party.
Photo/David Seymour Facebook

'Alakihihifo Vailala

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08 April 2025, 2:19pm

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ACT Party Leader David Seymour remains undeterred in his support for the Treaty Principles Bill.

This is despite a Justice Select Committee report revealing that 90 per cent of public submissions oppose the bill, and coalition partners National and New Zealand First have confirmed they will not support it during the second reading on Thursday.

Speaking on *Pacific Mornings,* Seymour insists that the bill, which aims to define Treaty principles in law, represents "the start of a journey" rather than its conclusion.

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"People need to ask themselves, what are the good arguments that have been put up against the principles I've proposed?" Seymour says.

"That the Parliament has the full right to make laws, that the Government should uphold the rights and the taonga of all New Zealanders, including Māori, and that we should all be treated equally before the law?"

The Select Committee process received over 300,000 submissions, the highest in New Zealand's history.

Many respondents contend that Seymour's framing of equality undermines the Treaty of Waitangi's commitment to partnership and addressing historic grievances.

But Seymour maintains that he will not regard these submissions as a reflection of public opinion, citing the example of the End of Life Choice Act, which passed via referendum despite facing similar opposition in submissions.

"People that submit to select committees usually submit because they're opposed to something," he says. "When you ask New Zealanders as a whole in scientific polling, [these ideas] are supported by a ratio of around two to one."

Hana Rāwhiti Maipi-Clarke tears up the Treaty Principles Bill and leads a haka in protest at the government's willingness to table it. (Photo: RNZ / Samuel Rillstone)

No threat to coalition stability

Despite the bill's likely failure at the second reading, Seymour rules out leaving the coalition agreement over this issue.

"The coalition agreement's been fulfilled," he says. "I still hope that my partners will find the courage to support something that most New Zealanders do actually want... but it's not easy doing these debates."

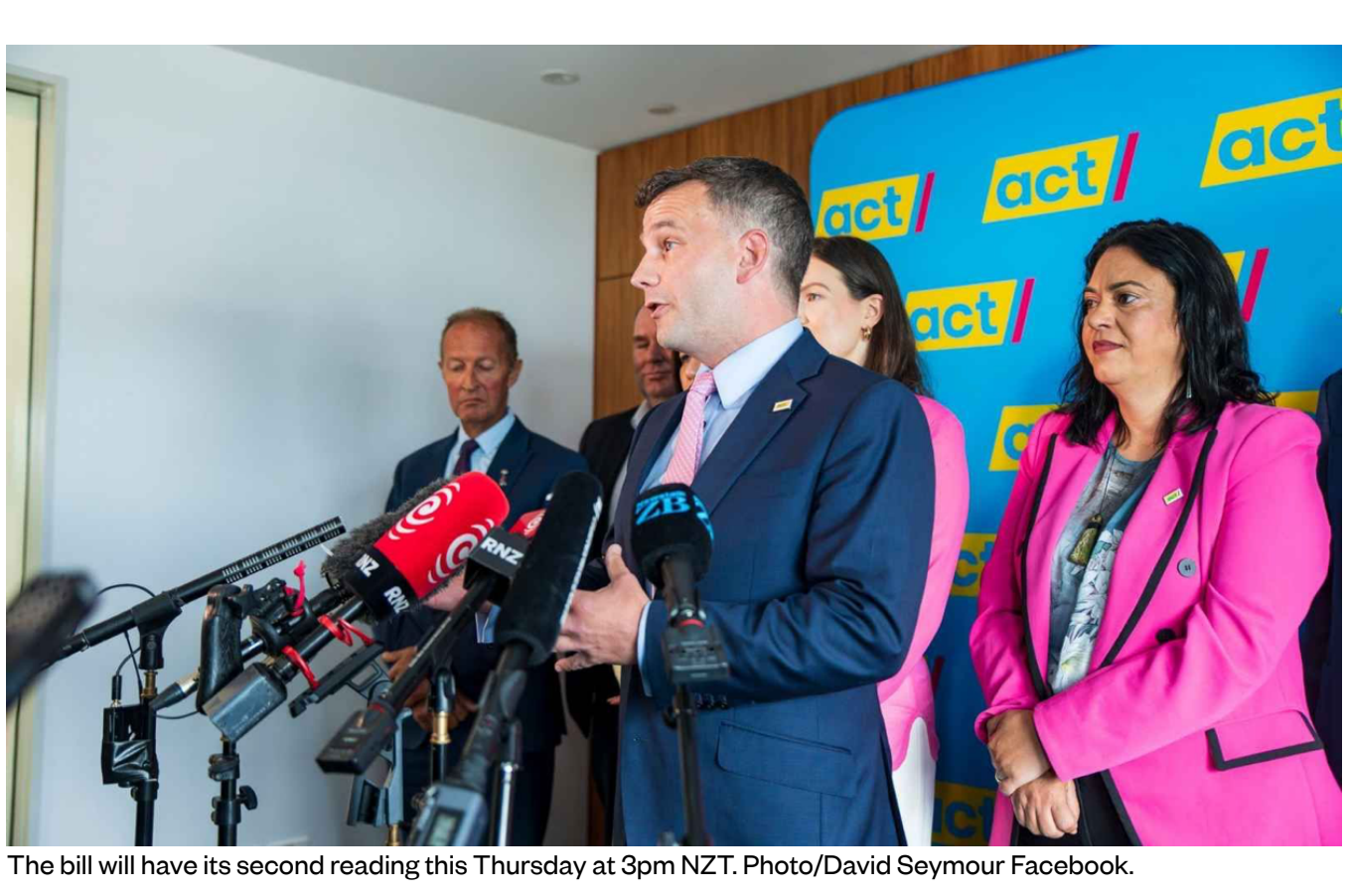
He argues that many New Zealanders, regardless of their ancestry or the time of their arrival in the country, should enjoy equal rights.

Silent supporters and a culture of intolerance

Seymour also expresses concerns about a growing culture of intolerance, particularly among younger people, which he believes discourages open support for ACT or the bill.

"If you have a different view, you can be ostracised quite viciously. That's a real shame because one thing a country needs is a culture of openness and separating the ideas from the person."

He believes there are "hundreds of thousands" of ACT supporters who may not publicly express their views but still back the principles behind the bill.


The bill will have its second reading this Thursday at 3pm NZT. Photo/David Seymour Facebook.

Seymour's legacy: "Promoting human flourishing"

When discussing his political legacy, Seymour says his goal is to foster a New Zealand where everyone can succeed without being held back by excessive bureaucracy or historical injustices.

"I don't believe that something that happened 200 years ago should decide what your prospects are today," he says.

He cites his advocacy for charter schools, housing reform, and market-based policies as efforts to promote opportunity and dismantle barriers to individual success.

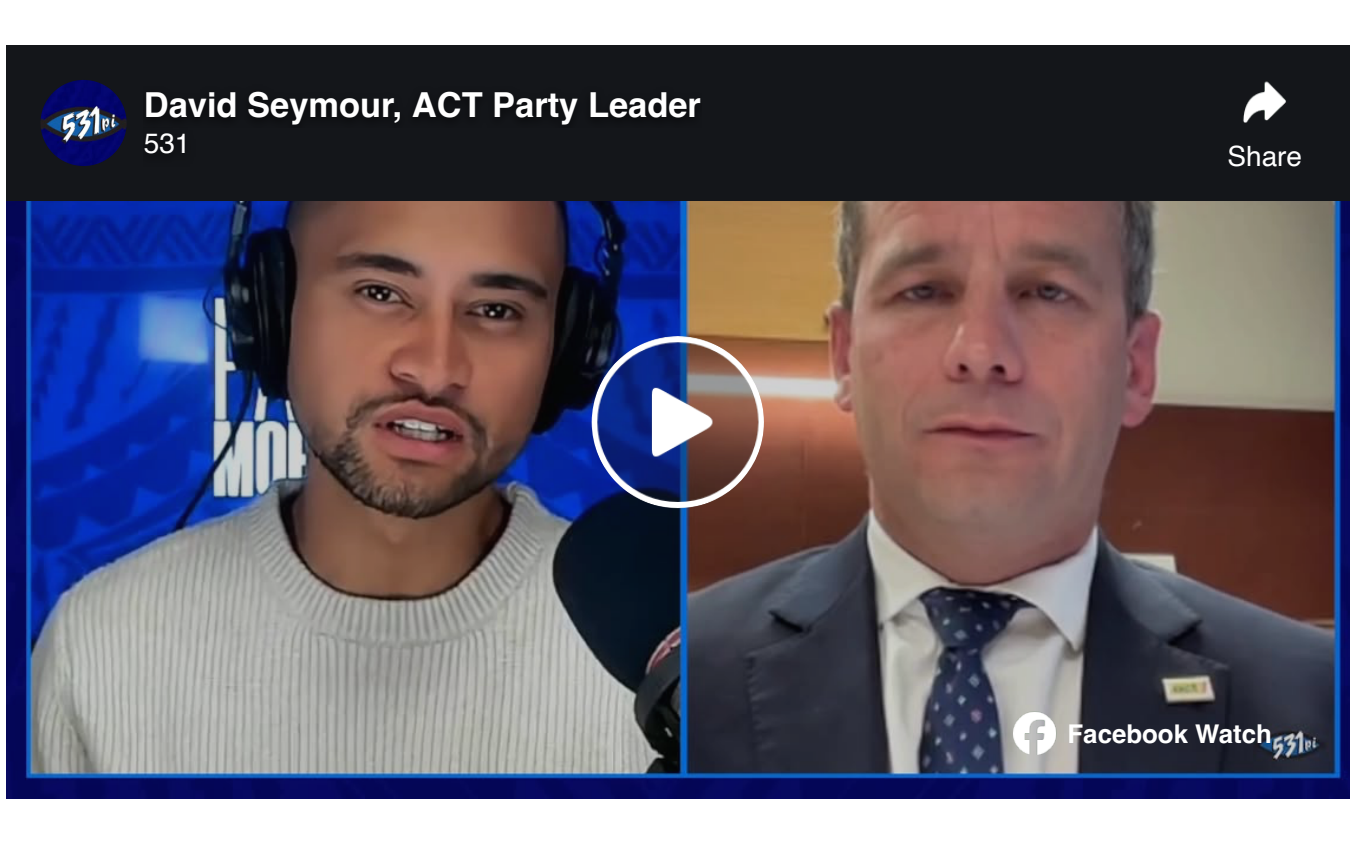
Ministry for Regulation delivers early results

As Minister for Regulation, Seymour highlights achievements in reducing red tape within the agriculture and horticulture sectors, with early childhood education next on the agenda.

He says an upcoming Regulatory Standards Bill will impose stricter limits on government overreach.

"There's also a lot of really little things where they've got involved and talked to other ministries and said, hey, this rule doesn't make sense, can you change it? It all adds up to creating a New Zealand with less red tape."

Watch David Seymour's full interview below.



Trump's tariffs: 'It's just a spiral'

On the topic of US tariffs under President Donald Trump, Seymour warns of potential global consequences and rising prices, although he concedes that New Zealand exporters might see short-term benefits.

As a proponent of free trade, he argues that increasing tariffs generally results in higher costs.

"I mean, it's just a spiral. It's not up to me to say what the Americans should be doing... But I think the consequences for the world are quite bad."

Still, Seymour acknowledges that New Zealand could benefit if its exports become comparatively cheaper in the American market, as surplus global goods shift to countries like New Zealand.

"You might see deflation for New Zealand because a lot of cheap things the Americans no longer want to buy are available to us. So, look, it may not be all bad in the short term. But as a principle, it's not the right way to do policy."

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POLITICS

How AI could change the way councils operate in Aotearoa

Environment Canterbury has established a working group to consider the impacts of Artificial Intelligence and advancing technology.

Can Artificial Intelligence (AI) replace politicians? Photo/OECD

David Hill, Local Democracy Reporter

PUBLISHED
08 April 2025, 2:05pm

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As councils grapple with the risks and benefits of Artificial Intelligence (AI), a Canterbury regional councillor has asked whether it could actually replace politicians.

Environment Canterbury (ECan) deputy chairperson Cr Deon Swiggs says AI and advancing technology raises many opportunities, as well as risks.

"I have a very real question - in the future, will we need politicians?"

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Andre Fa'aoso Sat, 24 May

Councillors voted to establish an AI working group at a council meeting last week, after staff presented a report in response to a motion from Cr Joe Davies.

Speaking to Local Democracy Reporting, Cr Swiggs echoed the thoughts of Cr Davies in suggesting that with advancing technology, people could vote on how rates are spent on a phone app.

AI could then collate the data and make a decision in real time.
"It is pie in sky stuff," Cr Swiggs admitted. "It is scary, but I also see opportunities for making better decisions."

Swiggs said in future Canterbury could have its own satellites monitoring the region and providing data on river levels and environmental risks in real time to help with decision making.

"People talk about 'big brother watching us', but I like to bring it back to making good decisions."

The AI working group will be chaired by Cr Davies and comprise Cr Swiggs, Nick Ward, Claire McKay, and Tutehounuku Korako.

Councillor Deon Swiggs says AI and advancing technology create many opportunities, as well as risks.

Cr McKay said new technology can be "scary", but the council needed to keep ahead of the changes.

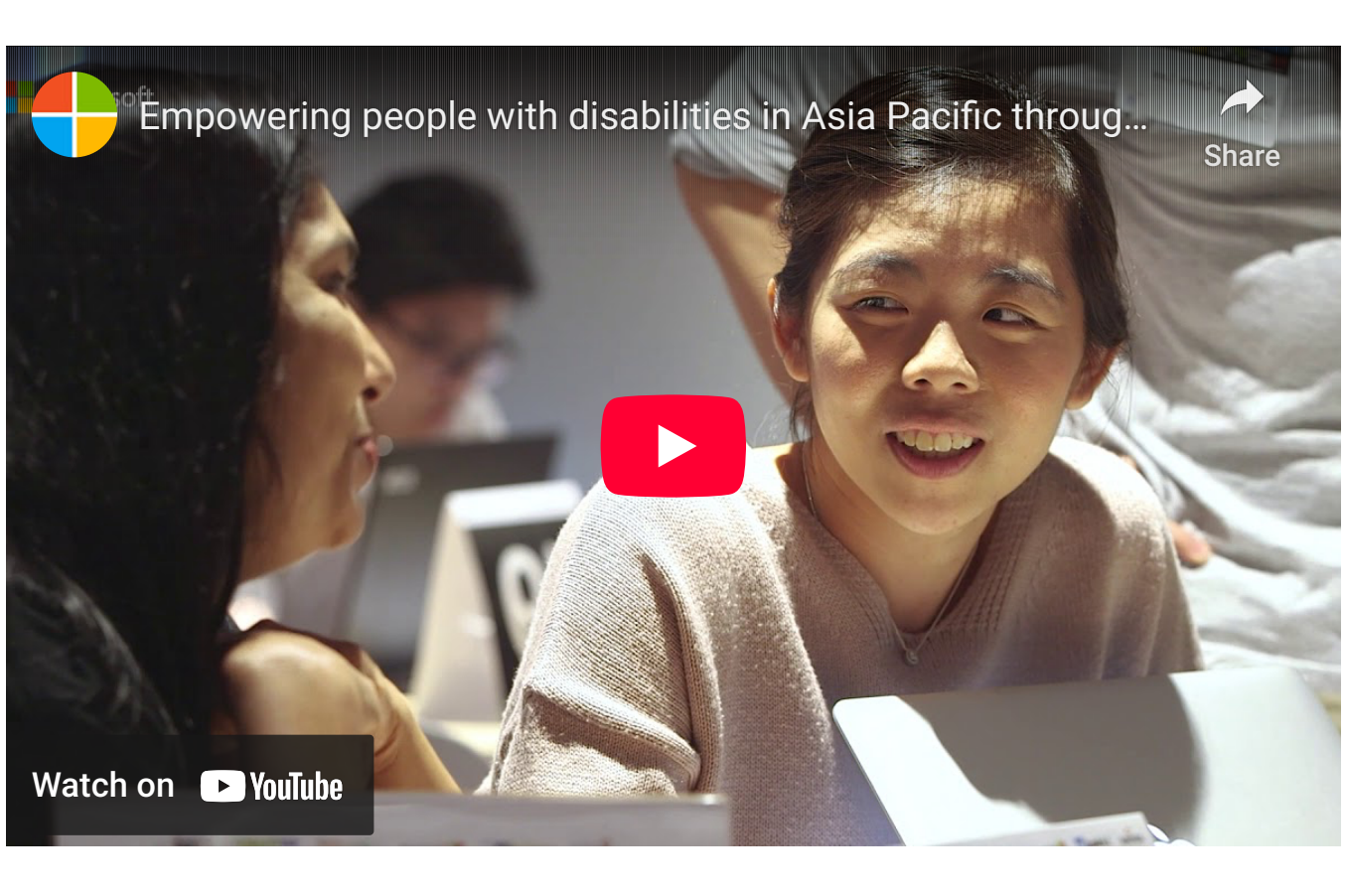
"New stuff coming along can be quite scary, so there is a tendency to ignore it and hope it will go away. But AI isn't going to go away."

She said most people will already be using AI, even if they don't realise it, through their email inboxes and internet searches.

ECan was already using new planning software which uses AI to help navigate the complexity and speed up the consenting process.

Cr Davies said he believed it was the first working group of councillors established to look into AI.

The new working group will have up to four forums a year which will be open to the public and livestreamed on YouTube.


Empowering people with disabilities in Asia Pacific throug...
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Forum topics are likely to include public transport, democracy, and resource management and biosecurity.

"All of those streams of government are going to change with technology," Cr Davies said. "If you do a thought experiment, you can imagine what sort of information is going into these areas and how it might be analysed with AI."

In the future, buses could be fully automated, while the new national ticketing system when introduced will see bus users tapping on and off with their cards.

It means ECan will be able to collect data of where people are going and how long they are on the bus, which will help with planning.

■ LDR is local body journalism co-funded by RNZ and NZ On Air.

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